

Review: Rosino Gibellini (trans. John Bowden), *The Liberation Theology Debate*, SCM Press Ltd. London, UK, 1986

Pages: 120

Long on Wind and Short on Substance

This heavily verbose meta-analysis of liberation theological works remains unclear to the end about what liberation theology actually is, and so ends up ‘debating’ over an undefined entity.

There are only a handful of Bible references, and when they do occur context is often out, e.g. setting up attitudes to “the poor” as the benchmark of future salvation Matthew 25.35-46 (the poor here are actually saved brethren).

Debating liberation and the knowledge of God without using the scriptures turns the whole debate (and theology) into an unholy mixture of feminism, humanism, Marxism, and any other manufactured political oppression one can think of.

The one redeeming quality is tracing the history of this phenomenon as well as its nefarious relationships with the multitude of other liberation movements.

Preface (pp. vii-viii)

I) *The Origin and Method of Liberation Theology* (pp. 1-19)

Liberation theology (LT) underwent a preparatory phase during Vatican II in 1962-1968.

The formative phase was 1968-1975 beginning with the Medellin conference.

In 1975, at the Detroit “Theology in the Americas” conference, theologians made first contact with other liberation ideologies, i.e., black and feminist.

LT acquired ecclesiastical status at the Medellin Conference in Colombia in 1968.

LT is militant in the struggle for liberation.

The UNO declaration of 1 May, 1974, was a plan to set up a new international economic order.

LT has three conceptual levels: sociopolitical, anthropological, and theological.

LT “begins from praxis and aims at praxis.

The assumption of socio-analytical mediation involves utilisation of conceptual instruments drawn from Marxist tradition.

LT gives priority to the popular ethos.

LT is to ultimately be understood in the context of a world revolution; the change must be universal.

II) Themes and Topics of Research in Liberation Theology (pp. 20-41)

Jesus Christ as Liberator: Jesus is said to announce the kingdom of God as ‘a new order of things’. This is said to be a Christology ‘from below’.

Latin American bishops did not take part in the Council of Trent (1545-1563), and only 601 (22%) of bishops at Vatican II were latino.

Modellin was an interpretation of Vatican II.

The Church must transition to one of “the people”.

‘Ecclesiogenesis’ was coined in June 1975 as the current system was seen to be “institutional fossilisation”.

From 1962, Rome began seeking connections with popular movements.

Ana also can mean ‘beyond’.

III) The Liberation Theology Controversy (pp. 42-60)

In 1974, the International Theological Commission sub-committee was formed and published a dossier on LT in 1977, as a prophecy from the Latin American church. In defence, LT defenders said that Marxism was only used as a tool to “clarify and enrich” some theological notions.

On August 6, 1983, the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith published *The Instruction on Certain Aspects of the Theology of Liberation* which said adoption of LT led to acceptance of the whole ideology of Marxism.

The Instruction called LT a “grave deviation from the Christian faith” also “a practical negation of it”. This document acted as a Roman warning. It also relied on ‘limits of growth’ analyses from the Club of Rome.

The French Revolution is described as a process of liberation.

IV) Doing Theology in a Divided World (pp. 61-78)

The Dar-es-Salaam Manifesto was the official birth certificate of Third World theology: “We call for...promotion of justice and the prevention of exploitation, accumulation of riches in the hands of a minority, racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression, discrimination...”

A *quinquennium* is a five-year period.

Salus animarum was Rome’s first theology that black Africans were simply savages. In the 1920s this was replaced by *plantatio Ecclesiae* so that blacks were *sedentes in tenebris et in umbra mortis*.

In 1956, a new ‘theology of incarnation’ was birthed as a black African theological discourse. Black theology was imported in the US and South Africa against apartheid. Desmond Tutu was a main representative.

Kosuke Koyama was a Japanese Christian ecumenist who wrote *Mount Fuji and Mount Sinai* as a dialogue between Asian and biblical spirituality.

Taiwanese Chinese C.S. Song wrote *Third-Eye Theology* in which Christ can be looked at with the third-eye of the Buddhist tradition.

There is a need for a new world order and a purification process which Christianity has to pass through.

In technocratic South Korea there is *Minjung* (“people” + “mass”) theology and the theology of *Han* (the collective sentiment of oppressed people).

The combined Christian presence in Asia is only 2%.

The First World’s version of LT is feminism, resistance, and crisis theology.

A genuine Universal Church first manifested at Vatican II.

Appendix) Two Theological Interviews: ‘We Cannot do Theology in a Dead Corner of History’ with Gustavo Gutierrez (pp. 79-87)

Where Is the Theology of Liberation Going? (pp. 88-95)

The relationship between LT and sociology admits Marxism.